

IN THE CLAIMS:

Cancel claim 18 without prejudice or disclaimer.

Please amend the claims as shown below:

Claims 1-18 (Canceled)

Claim 19. (Currently Amended): A cleaning method of a heat treatment apparatus for feeding cleaning gas in a treatment vessel and removing an unnecessary film in said treatment vessel, comprising the steps of:

preheating said cleaning gas outside said treatment vessel, and

feeding said preheated cleaning gas into said treatment vessel and heating and keeping said treatment vessel internally at a predetermined temperature,

wherein said cleaning gas is preheated up to a heat decomposition temperature of said cleaning gas at said preheating step, and

wherein said cleaning gas includes ClF_3 and is preheated up to a heat decomposition temperature of ClF_3 in a range of 300 to 1000°C at said preheating step so that said ClF_3 decomposes to Cl and F.

Claim 20. (Currently Amended) The cleaning method of a heat treatment apparatus according to Claim ~~18~~ or 19, wherein

said treatment vessel is heated and kept as at said predetermined temperature in a state that a holding tool of an object to be processed is contained in said treatment vessel.

Claim 21. (Currently Amended) The cleaning method of a heat treatment apparatus according to Claim ~~18~~ or 19, wherein

said unnecessary film in said treatment vessel is a same kind of film as a film formed on a surface of an object to be processed in said treatment vessel.

Claim 22. (Currently Amended): The cleaning method of a heat treatment apparatus according to Claim ~~18~~ or 19, wherein

the treatment vessel is made of quartz or ~~Si~~ SiC.